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Schoolscapes

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The Nature of the Education Program

By Claudine St-Germain
Translated by David Fuchs

In the opening presentation of this training session for resource persons, Robert Bisaillon, assistant deputy minister for preschool, elementary and secondary school, recalled the true nature of the education program.

"We are presently in the middle of the validation process of the Québec Education Program for Secondary Cycle One," said the assistant deputy minister. "I would like to take this opportunity to suggest some reflections on the nature of the education program."

There are some misunderstandings concerning this nature. Some people perceive the program as an accumulation of several subject-specific programs; this is a perception that does not take into account the links between subjects, cross-curricular competencies and broad areas of learning. Others consider it as a textbook. "The program was not conceived to be used by the students and it definitely cannot serve as a textbook," said Bisaillon. "Neither is it a pedagogical handbook, in which the essence would be lost in a vast amount of methodological details."

"The program is in fact a social project," explained the assistant deputy minister. It translates the expectations of society according to students' needs. It is also an educational itinerary: a learning path that develops the intelligence, sensitivity and active citizenship of students; a professional itinerary used by autonomous teachers according to their personality; and an institutional itinerary, both for schools and school boards, to establish a continuity between elementary and secondary levels and to provide essential training and support to teachers.

On the Docks of the Reform

By Claudine St-Germain
Translated by Eve Krakow

Reinelde Landry, organization coordinator for the training sessions for resource persons, introduced the goals of this session with a metaphor painted from her own experience growing up in Gaspésie.

She noted that one of the challenges in organizing the training sessions is to make them applicable to people at all stages in the implementation process, from those just beginning to get a handle on the reform to those who have begun to integrate the Québec Education Program and wish to further develop their strategies and understanding.

For this reason, since the very first training session, the team has approached the reform from several angles to help participants gain a clearer understanding of its overall goals: the role of socio-constructivism in the development of competencies; situations favourable to learning, evaluation and the regulation of learning; teaching practices for implementing the QEP; etc. "From one meeting to another, we became aware of the need to provide a different kind of guidance, both in the schools and at the training sessions," said Landry. "This led us to think about the role of the resource person and the conditions conducive to guidance."

The current session aims to have participants work together to explore the resources that can be used to guide all students toward success by taking into account the affective and cognitive dimensions and by supporting the commitment of learners (both students and school staff).

Having grown up in Gaspésie, Landry offered a colourful analogy between the resource persons and a typical

situation in her region. "The training sessions remind me of what goes on at the Gaspésie docks in the summer. Everyone at the docks has something to share. They might be wishing luck to those who are casting off for an ocean voyage or new shores. They might be greeting those who have come back from a fishing expedition, which may or may not have been plentiful: if they're not sharing their catches, then they're talking about the procedures followed to come home safely.

"There are also the big boats, with their captain and officers, who add to the gathering by sharing anecdotes and stories of great deeds. And finally there are the observers, who come to taste the adventure of departures and arrivals, breathing in the salty air and feeling the wind, sometimes chilly and sometimes warm, but always invigorating."

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The emotional dimension of learning

Placing Needs First

By Claudine St-Germain

Translated by Benjamin Waterhouse

If we want students to show an interest in their education, we have to show an interest in their needs, said Nérée Bujold, retired and associate professor in the Faculty of Education at Laval University. The emotional dimension of students is an integral part of their learning.

For people who prefer to discuss practical approaches in the field, it may seem a little theoretical to be talking about the emotional dimension of learning, said Bujold. "I used to be an education consultant for university teachers, and even professors working in a theoretical area were only interested in getting practical pointers! Unfortunately, someone who has mastered the practical aspects of teaching, but not the theory, doesn't always know what to do. If teachers have no mental picture of child development, they cannot diagnose problems and help solve them. An understanding of the theory–which, needless to say, can be transferred into teaching practices–is essential."

This is why this education researcher, officially retired but still active in the school system, came to share his thoughts on the emotional dimension of learning with resource persons attending the training session on November 26.

A group recently established at Laval University to document and research the integral development of individuals, of which Bujold is a member, has identified several dimensions that form part of this development: the cognitive, physical, social, emotional, moral and ecological dimensions. "To ensure that students succeed, we have to look at all the dimensions, including the emotional and physical dimensions. Teachers whose only goal is to transmit course content are a little like farmers who want to harvest apples but don't care about the roots of their apple trees! I find it reassuring that all these dimensions are addressed in the cross-curricular competencies, subject-specific competencies and subject areas of the Québec Education Program."

From needs come actions

Bujold explained his vision of emotional development. Underlying everything are our needs (whether innate or conditioned by the environment), and we spend our whole lives trying to meet them.

Our needs define our values, in other words the relative importance that we assign to the objects, persons and events that surround us–everything, in fact, that may be suitable to meet our needs. The more we lack (or have lacked in the past) a particular thing, the more we value it. The value of the things around us increases depending on how much we need them.

"I often see teachers who say they wish their students would take their subject more seriously, and my response is: 'Make it hard to get! Instead of stuffing them like prize turkeys, place them in situations where they need your subject. Dangle it in front of them, challenge them to come and get it.' This is how to get them to take a subject seriously."

Our values, in turn, form the basis for our perceptions (the selective reception of environmental stimuli), our emotions (physiological reactions to the stimuli we perceive), our interests (the desire to obtain an object of value), our motivation (an impulse for action) and our attitudes (ways of acting). Only when all the components have been called into play do we move into action, which involves verbal or non-verbal acts. "To promote attitudes favourable to learning, we have to build on the students' needs, values, perceptions, emotions, etc." said Bujold.

The difficulty is that only actions can be observed, and even then, only the traces they leave. To influence actions, we have to dig deeper and uncover students' needs. In other words, working back from an observable behaviour pattern, we have to attempt to reconstruct the emotional pathway it followed in order to identify the need that triggered it.

"The more I respond to a need, the more the associated behaviour pattern will tend to disappear," explained Bujold. "If I want to encourage the behaviour, I withdraw the object of value. This is what I mean by taking the emotional dimension into account: we can't feed someone who isn't hungry. Once I've discovered what my students lack, I've gained power. Our power over others depends on our ability to meet their needs. In other words, our power over our students depends on our ability to help them meet their objectives. I imagine that many teachers would like to have power over their students, if only the power to make them study!"

The theory of Abraham Maslow as seen by Herzberg can be useful in understanding the needs of students. The theory highlights the hierarchy of human needs. The first level is physiological security (food, clothing, shelter). Until we have met these primary needs, we don't look for anything else. Once the needs have been met, the second level is psychological security (a sense of belonging). We seek out our peers. If we are able to do so, we move on to the next level: self-esteem. "Seen from this angle, a child's ability to be part of a group forms the foundation for the development of his or her self-esteem," stated Bujold.

Moving from the need for self-esteem to the next level (appreciation of others, or altruism) is also the turning point between non-motivation and motivation. At this point, Bujold warned about the dangers inherent in evaluation methods. "Every time we compromise students' self-esteem, we reduce their motivation. We have to be very careful about handing out marks. They often undermine self-esteem and reduce motivation. Evaluation methods must be used with as much tact and diplomacy as possible."

Only after the needs for security and esteem have been met do we express a need for knowledge. If children do not have opportunities to mix with others, talk to them and help them, they will not be interested in learning. Next come the needs for aesthetic pleasure, actualization and transcendency.

The need to take the emotional dimension into account

Working with students' emotional dimension automatically raises ethical considerations, since changing an order of values creates an ethical problem. "Many teachers are unwilling to address the actual needs of their students because of this," said Bujold.

There is justification for doing so, however. In fact, any training process inevitably involves an intervention in the emotional dimension. Nérée Bujold has identified several needs that can justify intervention: self-protection, preservation of the species, social integration, social order, preservation of the environment and transcendency. Care is still needed, though, to avoid encroaching on an individual's private life.

Bujold has also identified several types of intervention connected with the emotional dimension, including gratification (responding to an important need), counselling (assistance based on interpersonal communication), exemplification (exhibiting the behaviour pattern we are trying to promote), social interaction (the influence of the group on the transmission of values), practice (authentic situations), reinforcement (approval, encouragement, etc.), evaluation (power to provide feedback) and conditioning (behaviourism).

Lastly, Bujold carried out some interesting research on 3 000 students at Laval University, to discover which factors were most likely to explain their commitment to a program of study. The findings show that the anticipated academic outcome had little effect on commitment. The most significant elements were satisfaction with the course (1.7 %), a close relationship with the teacher (9%) and, exceeding all the others, positive feelings towards the teacher (26%). When taking a closer look at this positive sentiment, the research team discovered that the most important variable was the teacher's pedagogical style (whether or not the teacher focused on the students' learning).

"Teachers have a huge influence over their students' commitment," concluded Bujold. We often hear teachers claim that they're not there to be liked! My response to that is, if your students don't like you, they won't like your subject either. As teachers, it is our duty to be liked and, to achieve that, we have to focus on the needs of our students."

How to Grow a Healthy Apple Tree

By Eve Krakow

In Workshop 1, participants pursued reflection on the role of the cognitive and affective dimensions of the learning process. In small teams and then as a group, they discussed what they had learned during the morning's presentation by Nérée Bujold, points they agreed or disagreed with, and elements they wanted to learn more about. The following is a report on what went on in one of the workshop groups.

"Kids don't learn from people they don't like," was the first point evoked. While in some ways this may seem obvious, the research Bujold presented was new to many. One school principal commented that this is a significant revelation for some teachers who tend to focus on the subject rather than on the students.

One elementary school teacher, however, found it disturbing to learn that the teacher is at the core of the student's motivation. "If the teacher is to be a guide and a facilitator, how do we 'wean' students off the teacher to become autonomous learners?" It was suggested that such autonomy comes once the student's basic emotional needs are met.

This led to a discussion on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (introduced in Bujold's presentation) and how teachers are to address these needs in the classroom. For example, participants discussed the importance of creating a classroom environment where everyone feels accepted, regardless of their learning difficulties or other differences. How do you do that in concrete terms?

One participant was particularly concerned with how to meet the needs of students in disadvantaged communities. He explained that in his region, the high level of unemployment and welfare means that many of his students lack the basic needs in Maslow's hierarchy. "How do we get them to the other levels when, for 16 hours of the day, they don't have the basic ones?"

He also wondered why the reform does not target parenting skills as well, given that research shows that affective and cognitive-based learning occurs most importantly in the earliest years of child development. "If children learn from people they like, then learning begins at home. Recent research on at-risk students shows the importance of parental models.

Another participant pointed out that the social dimension and the need to belong to a group are critical at the secondary level. "We need to recognize that high school students' need to be accepted is very strong. They're coming to school to be with their friends, to hang out. So perhaps if the classroom becomes a place for that, they are more likely to be motivated."

Dealing with resistance

Bujold had stated that one of the ways to overcome resistance to change is to let people express their concerns and frustrations. Yet some participants argued that in their experience, resistance is not so easily overcome.

"Teachers are frustrated because their needs have not been met," said one participant, who is the principal of a pilot school. "People will always resist something they don't understand, particularly if they have not been given the right tools to understand it."

She said that as the QEP makes its way down the conduit to the schools, a lot is lost. It doesn't come with the professional development and discussion that are provided at sessions like this one, and finding the time for such activities in the schools is still a big issue. While a few teachers at the school may be receiving training, by the time they come back to their peers, the reform is already supposed to be implemented. "There is a feeling that the MEQ does not understand the complexity of the school and the daily tasks and student issues that teachers have to deal with."

The issue of evaluation is also still a major concern. "Until secondary school teachers are convinced that they are doing the right thing to prepare their students not only for CEGEP and university in Québec, but also for outside Québec and for the real world, resistance will be absolute," said another school principal. Another person added, "If evaluation is to be a part of teaching and learning, it has to be meshed with the program, not presented separately."

Participants agreed, however, on the need to recognize that it takes a long time for people to become familiar with the language of the QEP. The workshop leader noted that the English-speaking community has the added challenge of finding appropriate terms for many of the concepts developed in French.

Finally, participants wondered how the research presented this morning fits in with more recent research on motivation. "No one is going to dispute Maslow's theory, but there is a lot of recent research on personalities, emotions and dealing with children with certain problems." What connections and conclusions can be made?

Participants particularly liked Bujold's apple tree analogy for focusing on the whole child (making sure the tree has strong roots instead of just looking for the apples). They also agreed with the notion that one has to understand the theory before being able to effectively apply it in practice. Yet they are faced with the challenge of how to do this in schools, given the time and resource constraints. "As a pedagogical consultant, I know I won't have time to go over all the theory with my teachers," one person commented. "I need practical tools to bridge the gap between theory and practice."

It was hoped that the subsequent workshops of the two-day training session would provide participants with some of these answers and tools.

Burning Questions

By David Fuchs

Participants during the second workshop raised a series of questions on the strategies to support teaching practices, interdisciplinarity and cycle life in order to help achieve the aims of the Québec Education Program and create the conditions necessary for a balanced affective school life.

On Cycle life

"How do we change the perception that students who take more time to learn are considered as failures?"

"How do we reconcile locally developed initiatives in the spirit of the QEP with the legislative requirements and constraints of the MEQ? For instance, some schools are looking at different ways to organize their time in order to plan for cycle learning and yet they are facing such constraints as students having to be in class 180 days. This means that teachers who would like to organize cycle work turn around and say: 'I don't have the time.'"

"What is the role of each educational stakeholder in order to make cycle-based learning work?"

"How do you integrate students from and into other constituencies?"

"How feasible are changes to the collective agreement to make time and support reform? We can't put any of our cross-curricular ideas into place if we can't find a way to make the timetables and the structures we have fit the reform."

On Teaching Practices

"How do you manage two different teaching practice cultures within your own school?"

"Do teachers have effective technical support–to maintain the proper operation of computers and photocopy machines–and textbooks to be able to collect the necessary information in order to create complex learning tasks?"

Interdisciplinarity

"How do we bring all teachers in a school to focus on a school or cycle project? How do we get them excited about working together?"

"The reform is coming at a time when there are a lot of new teachers who are shopping around for their job; their personal concerns are very important: 'I have a job but I also have a life besides this.' The reform requires a lot of goodwill and work beyond the hours that are expected. That is a clash of culture, and there is only so long that you can sustain people on goodwill. They need to be fired up with such things as merit: 'How do we recognize those leaders that are pushing ahead?'"

"How flexible is the Ministry and the Basic School Regulation for the students? Given that interdisciplinarity is crucial to the successful implementation of the QEP, is the Ministry prepared to make provisions to have cycle-team planning time incorporated into the teaching workload? Are we going to have recognized planning time? This is also about the flexibility at the Ministry level to give incentives to teachers to get involved in interdisciplinary work. We need to start a new culture for these new teachers."

***Schoolscapes* is published by the preschool, elementary and secondary education sector.**

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Revision of the basic school regulation	**Consultation on the proposed regulations with partners in the school network SPRING 2003**
DIRECTION DES PROGRAMMES	
Québec Education Program for Secondary Cycle One	**Validation: FALL 2002** **Revision: WINTER 2002** **Distribution: AUGUST 2003**
DIRECTION DE L'ÉVALUATION	
Frame of reference for evaluation in preschool and elementary school	**Distribution in schools SEPTEMBER 2002**
Regional training on the competency scales and the frame of reference	**OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER 2002**
Policy on the Evaluation of Student Learning	**JUNE 2003**
DIRECTION DE L'ADAPTATION SCOLAIRE ET DES SERVICES COMPLÉMENTAIRES	
Support for at-risk students	**Regional study days SPRING 2003**
Frame of reference for the organization of student services	**Distribution: FALL 2002** **Professional development: FALL 2002**
Renewal of the MEQ-MSSS service agreement	**WINTER 2003**

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